

# A FOREIGN POLICY PERSPECTIVE ON THE SDGS

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*The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are unprecedented in their scope and ambition for human progress. By removing or mitigating many grievances that fuel conflict, progress on the SDGs can be a critical lever to build and sustain peace and stability worldwide. The transformative change they aim to bring about can also affect geopolitical dynamics, balances of power and interdependencies. Thus, progress on the SDGs has significant implications for foreign policy. In brief, core foreign policy priorities depend on SDG progress, and foreign policy makers also have a critical role to play in supporting implementation and managing the challenges associated with transformational change. Despite these critical stakes, the foreign policy dimensions of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda have not been sufficiently broached by foreign ministries to date.*

This paper maps out the relevance of the SDGs to foreign policy. Taking the six SDGs under review at the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) in 2018 as entry points, we analyse how progress on specific SDGs may support or undermine progress on foreign policy priorities, especially **SDG 16: peace**.

**For each SDG under review, we provide a detailed analysis under the annex section.** We conclude with three steps for action through which foreign policy can better anticipate and steer the geopolitical implications of a sustainable transformation to minimise the risks and maximise the positive impacts on sustainable development.



The set of goals to be reviewed at the HLPF 2018: SDG 6 (water), SDG 7 (energy), SDG 15 (life on land), SDG 11 (cities), SDG 12 (consumption and production), and SDG 17 (partnerships).

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## 1. Introduction: The Foreign Policy Relevance of the SDGs

**Agenda 2030 and its 17 SDGs** are the first comprehensive, global, and “silo-breaking” agenda for achieving the foundations of resilience and sustainable peace. At a time of increasing nationalism and populism, the SDGs are important symbols of the value of the transformational capabilities of multilateralism. It is a transformative agenda, beyond incremental change, and importantly, it is a *global* agenda – beyond development policy. This agenda resonates with fundamental foreign policy objectives such as improving international security, stability, and prosperity. In other words, because not achieving the SDGs implies severe risks for these priorities, foreign policy makers have high stakes in the SDGs’ outcomes.

The SDGs also have a significant impact on geopolitics. For example, if the world is to transition to decarbonised economies as envisaged under SDG 7 on energy, this will alter the power dynamics between oil producing and oil importing economies. Also, efforts to pursue SDG 6 on sustainable water for all will affect and be affected by highly strained relations between Iraq, Turkey, and Iran over the sharing of waters of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers.

The SDGs play an essential part in achieving foreign policy goals such as stability and peace. For example, achieving stability in countries affected by conflict and extremism requires livelihood security and strengthened governance – which are the core dimensions of sustainable development. However, it is in these very states that progress on the SDGs is the weakest<sup>1</sup>. There are many reasons for this: the challenges of operating in fragile contexts, the risk-averse and results-oriented nature of development funding and the concern about poor returns on development investments are but a few. A foreign policy frame that is ready to embrace political risks in the interest of regional stability might help sidestep these negative incentives for development actors.

Foreign policy can and must play an essential role in ensuring that these transitions are managed peacefully. And peace, in turn, is not only an SDG in itself but also an important precondition for the successful implementation of most other SDGs. This interdependence implies a need for greater engagement between the development community – that has taken a leadership role in the SDG process until now – and the foreign policy community – that often has the mandate to ensure *cross-governmental coherence in external relations*.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, conflict-affected countries lag their peers in development outcomes: for example, the 10 worst performing countries for maternal mortality globally are all conflict-affected or post-conflict states. See <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures> (accessed 13 November 2015)

**THE SDGS ARE VITAL FOR FOREIGN POLICY...**

**... AS THEY AFFECT PEACE, SECURITY AND GEOPOLITICS WORLD-WIDE AND REQUIRE WORKING BEYOND THE USUAL DEVELOPMENT PARADIGMS.**

**MINDFUL MANAGEMENT OF SYSTEMIC CHANGES**

**IMPLEMENTING THE SDGS WILL BRING ABOUT SUBSTANTIAL CHANGES TO GLOBAL DYNAMICS, WHICH NEED CAREFUL AND INFORMED MANAGEMENT**

Therefore, the case for foreign policy engagement does not only rest on the relevance of the SDGs relevant foreign policy. The range of diplomatic tools that foreign policy-makers have at their disposal can help circumvent some of the challenges that SDG implementation is facing, especially in fragile states. Harnessing that potential depends on a **deliberate and coherent foreign policy approach to the SDGs** that builds on a systematic assessment of the trade-offs and interdependencies of the achievement or failures of specific SDGs.

This paper will analyse the SDGs under review<sup>2</sup>, one by one, looking at their foreign policy relevance based on a list of six areas we identify as emblematic of contemporary foreign policy priorities, such as forced migration and conflict prevention. It does not attempt to offer a comprehensive review of the foreign policy relevance of the SDGs. Instead, it serves as a starting point in supporting foreign policy makers to address the links between the SDGs and foreign policy. By illustrating the foreign policy relevance of the SDGs, we make a case for foreign policy to contribute, through their diplomatic means, to the effective implementation of Agenda 2030. It will facilitate the usage of SDGs as an integrated framework for foreign policy action.

## 2. SDGs, Geopolitics, and Peace

The SDGs are inextricably linked to geopolitics. The pursuance of the 2030 Agenda will bring about changes in power and political dynamics which will have geopolitical implications. Dynamics relating to the winners (and losers) of SDG implementation need to be managed with mindfulness and pragmatism to ensure that Agenda 2030 brings about the kind of positive transformation as anticipated.

The adverse risks and potential trade-offs are manifold. For example, increasing agricultural yield, as required to reach zero hunger under SDG 2, cannot be done by sustaining small-scale agriculture. However, shifting from small-holder farming to large-scale industrial agriculture will manifest the divide between the Global North and the South and can harm small-holder farmers and pastoralists. Tensions around such shifts are already visible in the marginalisation of pastoralism and pastoralists in the agricultural development plans in Kenya and Ethiopia. To give another example, efforts to promote sustainable cities under SDG 11 require shifting power to sub-national level. Decentralization does not necessarily contribute to peace and stability. Such a transition needs the right governance structures to be in place and

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<sup>2</sup> SDG 6 (water): Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all  
SDG 7 (energy): Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all  
SDG 15 (life on land): Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss  
SDG 11 (cities): Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable  
SDG 12 (consumption and production): Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns  
SDG17 (partnerships): Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

## FRAGILE STATES

IMPLEMENTING SDGS  
IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS  
REQUIRES A FOREIGN  
POLICY FRAMING

## GEOPOLITICS AND THE SDGS

TO ENSURE THAT  
AGENDA 2030 BRINGS  
ABOUT THE KIND OF  
POSITIVE TRANSFOR-  
MATION ANTICIPATED,  
OF THE INTERESTS OF  
THOSE WHO (INTERMIT-  
TENTLY) LOSE FROM  
SDG IMPLEMENTATION  
NEED TO BE CONSID-  
ERED.

calls for much stronger policy coordination between the central government and the decentralised structures. These risks are not just hypotheticals. We can already see the negative transboundary repercussions of global agriculture policy, the purchasing of agricultural land and virtual water by China in Africa<sup>3</sup>, and the potentially destabilising effects of the decarbonisation agenda.

These examples are but a few of the myriad implications of the SDGs on geopolitics. These geopolitical knock-on consequences of the 2030 Agenda need full and further analysis if we are to avoid doing any inadvertent harm while pursuing the SDGs.

At the same time, geopolitics also affects the landscape within which we pursue the SDGs. Geopolitics can be seen to be undermining the 2030 Agenda, with the re-nationalization of politics in the Global North negatively affecting political leadership and good governance in the Global South. The shifting of power and political influence from Europe towards China and India means shifting away from former leadership to new drivers on sustainable transformation. Furthermore, we are moving away from rule-based policymaking and multilateralism. Here we need foreign policy to promote rule-based policymaking and cooperation, support regional collaboration, and help governments to improve their governance. Governance - at national and global level - is the DNA of the 2030 Agenda (and any other transformative or multilateral agreement).

A better understanding of these geopolitical trends is required such that we can employ the appropriate multilateral or foreign policy tools to address them to ensure they do not undermine SDG progress. It should, in turn, shape the way we implement the 2030 Agenda. Importantly, it means working beyond the usual development paradigms.

### **Sustainable Development and Sustaining Peace (SDG 16)**

The 2030 Agenda links inextricably to peace and stability. Peace and stability are fundamental prerequisites to sustainable development, yet in some cases transformation and change can also bring about conflict and instability. Synergies between peace and sustainable development are increasingly recognised among development and security communities, and stressed in numerous key official documents, the most influential being the two UN resolutions on *Sustaining Peace* by the Security Council and the General Assembly.<sup>4</sup> But this recognition, along with the reality that the SDGs have significant geopolitical ramifications, is not sufficiently reflected in SDG processes.

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<sup>3</sup> See for example: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2015/11/05/what-do-we-know-about-the-chinese-land-grab-in-africa/> [accessed on 11.07.18]

<sup>4</sup> Security Council resolution 2282 (2016); General Assembly resolution 70/262 (2016)

SDG 16 is the goal that relates to peace most explicitly and has been one of the most crucial SDGs for foreign policy. A survey by AidData<sup>5</sup> that asked 3,500 leaders<sup>6</sup> in 126 low- and middle-income which of the 17 SDGs they prioritize, found that SDG 16 is the second most important in their perception (a close second to Goal 4, quality education).<sup>7</sup> An analysis of development funding showed that three goals that deal with climate and environment together received about \$23.8 billion – just seven percent of what SDG 16 received<sup>8</sup>. The numbers say a lot about the *attention* given to peace, but the emphasis is not translated into adequate action – evidenced by decreasing levels of ODA investment and lower rates of SDG attainment in fragile states<sup>9</sup>.

The targets and indicators defined under SDG 16, ranging from “reduce all forms of violence and related death rates” and “develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions” to “promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies” are not sufficient to capture peace as a whole, neither are the indicators to measure progress.

Peaceful, just and inclusive societies have other SDGs as their building blocks. The Pathfinder Initiative found that only one-third of targets that measure aspects of peace, inclusion or access to justice fall under SDG 16.<sup>10</sup> For instance, peaceful societies require reducing violence against women and girls (SDG target 5.2) and addressing child labour and child soldiers (SDG target 8.7). SDGs targets in the social realm that address questions of employment, inequality, social development, etc. are the ones most identified to be the building blocks of peace.

The environmental dimension and the relevance of environmental shocks or the depletion of natural resources for social or political conflict are yet missing in the analysis. There are spaces where their links to peace need to be more explicitly recognised. For example, land and water management needs to be an essential part of SDG 16 activities on peace and governance.

Any external action would thus benefit from systematically assessing the relevance of individual SDGs and identifying entry points to leverage their contribution to foreign policy goals, including peace (for example, a peace dividend achieved through the more equitable provision of basic services). Such an assessment should also examine how foreign policy instruments can (and do) support the SDGs. The outcome of such a process would provide an as yet lacking reference point to ensure that SDG progress does not inadvertently undermine foreign policy goals and that foreign policy can better contribute to the advancement of the SDGs. Such a process, aligning the SDGs with foreign policy,

<sup>5</sup> Custer et al. 2018

<sup>6</sup> government officials, civil society leaders, private sector representatives, and development practitioners in 22 sectors of development policy (AidData’s 2017 Listening to Leaders Survey)

<sup>7</sup> McDonnell 2018

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Sachs et al. 2018

<sup>10</sup> Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies 2017



## SDG 16 AIMS TO...

...“PROMOTE PEACEFUL AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, PROVIDE ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL AND BUILD EFFECTIVE, ACCOUNTABLE AND INCLUSIVE INSTITUTIONS AT ALL LEVELS”

## SDG 16 AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

PEACE AND STABILITY ARE FUNDAMENTAL PREREQUISITES TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, YET TRANSFORMATION AND CHANGE CAN ALSO BRING ABOUT CONFLICT AND INSTABILITY

would serve as a roadmap towards “Sustainable Foreign Policy.” With this policy brief, we provide a first outline of the foreign policy dimension of the SDGs. It is the authors’ intention to initiate a debate around this topic, in order to further engage foreign policy in the implementation of the 2030 agenda.

### **Sustainable Foreign Policy**

“Sustainable Foreign Policy” implies improving the coherence of foreign policy action under a guiding principle of promoting sustainable development and peace. The 2030 Agenda already points towards an integrated and network-oriented way of doing foreign policy. SDG 17 attests this by highlighting policy coherence and partnerships as key conditions of sustainable development. Promoting integration and partnerships is also a fundamental element of foreign policy.

Foreign policy could and should also contribute to the implementation of the agenda in fragile contexts, where diplomacy can help to improve transboundary cooperation when necessary and provide the kind of foreign policy framing required to circumvent the geopolitical obstacles to implementing the SDGs. More precisely, foreign policy can also offer channels for ensuring a different way of implementing the agenda in fragile contexts, making development assistance and cooperation towards the use of sustainable resources more conflict-sensitive.

“**Sustainable Foreign Policy**” supports holistic SDG implementation and external action, to avoid adverse events such as destabilization, radicalization or forced displacement, and to promote positive developments such as prosperity, a strengthened resource base, or mutually beneficial trade and investments. It is no longer enough to talk about the interlinkages. 2030 Agenda has wide-ranging geopolitical implications and as such, has to be better embedded in foreign policy.

For instance, if water is not sufficiently available to meet basic human needs (SDG 6), that impedes socio-economic development and fuels displacement and conflict, posing significant risks for stability and prosperity. It is clear that transboundary water cooperation - facilitated by bilateral and multilateral development agencies - needs to balance out competing water user interests within countries and across borders. With a few exceptions, transboundary water cooperation is still the domain of development policy. However, all critical issues in larger basins require as much buy-in by diplomats as other geopolitical crises on other subjects.

A foreign policy perspective on transboundary waters would be twofold: a) co-design transboundary water cooperation projects so that they are embedded in larger development perspectives for a given country and particularly at the regional scale and b) to support transboundary water management with their unique diplomatic skills and toolbox. Water management from this perspective is therefore primarily a foreign policy issue and only in second place subject to technical development cooperation.

### **A NEW OR ADDITIONAL TASK?**

**IT IS NOT ABOUT ADDING ANYTHING NEW, BUT ABOUT BETTER ALIGNING FOREIGN POLICY AND THE SDGS TO MAXIMISE THE POSITIVE OUTCOMES**

### **SUSTAINABLE FOREIGN POLICY...**

**...SUPPORTS SDG IMPLEMENTATION AND EXTERNAL ACTION TO AVOID NEGATIVE RESULTS SUCH AS DESTABILIZATION AND FORCED DISPLACEMENT, AND TO PROMOTE POSITIVE OUTCOMES SUCH AS PROSPERITY.**

To give another example, deforestation and unsustainable land management (addressed under **SDG 15**) undermine millions of livelihoods and contribute to resource-related disputes and social grievances. Over the last 60 years, 40-60 percent of internal armed conflicts in Africa have been linked to natural resources<sup>11</sup>, and inefficient land tenure systems compound these pressures. It is well established that development activities which promote sustainable forest management also contribute to conflict prevention – adding to the elusive ‘peace dividend.’ But when it comes to the SDGs, while the links between peace and development are recognised, there is little difference in action on the ground in fragile contexts compared to other more stable settings. At the operational level, there is a widespread failure to recognise that the activities, such as sustainable forest and land management in fragile and conflict contexts, require a different *conflict-sensitive* approach.

When pursuing foreign policy goals, such as building up institutions, capacities, and norms in fragile states, foreign policy instruments such as bilateral trade agreements and special economic zones can help immensely. This can be done by creating incentives or establishing conditions for cooperation regarding SDG implementation, for example, promoting land reforms and participatory management, investing in land restoration, and adherence to voluntary schemes such as the EU’s Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) or the Forest Stewardship Council’s timber certification scheme.

Foreign policy initiatives in areas relevant to Agenda 2030 have been around well before the SDGs, so this is not a question of adding anything new or additional to foreign policy priorities. It is about better aligning foreign policy and the SDGs to maximise the positive outcomes of their convergence and minimise the inadvertent harm they may pose to each other, towards a “Sustainable Foreign Policy.” The first step here is to understand the linkages between the SDGs and foreign policy better. However, until now, there has been no explicit discourse or analysis on the positive and negative impacts of the SDGs on foreign policy and the implications of foreign policy on the SDGs. The examples set out below and in the annex to this paper illustrate how such awareness of these implications is vital if progress on the SDGs is to be genuinely sustainable.

### 3. SDGs under Review in 2018 and Six Foreign Policy Priorities

We set out six areas of external action which we deem to have broad foreign policy relevance. This is not intended to be a *comprehensive list* of 21<sup>st</sup>-century foreign policy priorities. Instead, the six areas are illustrative of current areas of key significance for foreign policy. Based on

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Environment Programme 2012

**MORE THAN**

**40%**

**OF INTERNAL ARMED CONFLICTS IN AFRICA HAVE BEEN LINKED TO NATURAL RESOURCES, INCLUDING LAND ISSUES**

**THE SDGS ARE A PREREQUISITE...**

**...FOR FOREIGN POLICY WHILE FOREIGN POLICY IS AN IMPORTANT VEHICLE FOR ACHIEVING THE SDGS.**

this nominal framework, we look at how each of the SDGs under review affects and are affected by each area.

Our premise is that each of these six areas would greatly benefit from better understanding the implications of the 2030 Agenda, and in turn, could also help support SDG progress.

The six foreign policy priority areas are as follows:

1. **Preventing (forced) migration and displacement**
2. **Conflict prevention and stabilisation**
3. **Reducing humanitarian need**
4. **Countering terrorism and violent extremism**
5. **Promoting foreign trade and investment**
6. **Safeguarding geopolitical stability**

Using these policy areas as a framework, we first look at the various pathways through which the SDGs affect these areas. Secondly, we identify where SDG implementation is most needed and to what extent is a peace dividend likely, and thirdly identify new and existing mechanisms for their application, to move towards more coherent policy-making in these areas.

### 1. Preventing (forced) migration and displacement

Globally, migration and forced displacement are at historic levels. While many political, social and economic factors influence migration, the primary drivers of *forced* displacement include conflicts, natural disasters as well as human rights violations and abuses.<sup>12</sup> Migration and forced displacement trends are of significant foreign policy relevance for countries of origin, transit, and destination. The socio-economic gains of safe and regular migration can be extensive. Forced displacement and irregular migration on the other hand, often present complex challenges<sup>13</sup>. A growing body of evidence is beginning to show that **human security** offers a more active approach to many of the underlying threats and problems associated with forced and irregular migration than traditional state-security models. Identifying the underlying causes of forced migration can point to solutions which help make migration processes more rational and humane. Addressing threats to human security (underpinned by the SDGs) can reduce forced migration and support conditions for peaceful migration that are driven by choice rather than necessity. This can help contribute to migration and effective integration which positively contributes to development, economic security, trade, and state security.

The analysis of the SDGs under review shows:

- Water insecurity can be a reason for forced displacement and fuel grievances in host communities. Water diplomacy can

## MIGRATION

THREATS TO HUMAN SECURITY, LINKED TO ENVIRONMENTAL PRESSURES, SOCIAL INJUSTICES AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY, AFFECT LIVELIHOODS AND MIGRATION PATTERNS IN MANY REGIONS

<sup>12</sup> McAuliffe 2018

<sup>13</sup> This formed an important component of the G20 Leader's Declaration under the German Presidency in 2017, see: [https://www.g20germany.de/Webs/G20/EN/G20/Summit\\_documents/summit\\_documents\\_node.html](https://www.g20germany.de/Webs/G20/EN/G20/Summit_documents/summit_documents_node.html)

support sustainable and equitable water use and reduce the causes of migration. (see **SDG 6**)

- Universal access to clean energy could vastly improve the situation of millions of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons. Climate change impacts can heighten conflicts over resources, deteriorate living conditions, and thus trigger migratory movements). A shift towards sustainable energy production would help reduce these drivers of migration. (see **SDG 7**)
- Rural-urban movement within countries is likely to increase pressures on cities as more people move to urban environments that already face vulnerability to disaster and fragility risks. In 2015, disasters and violence caused 50 percent of a total of 51 million refugees and internally displaced persons to flee to urban areas. A disproportionate share of slum/shack dwellers is migrants. Inclusive, resilient cities and urban areas can help cope with these challenges and strengthen urban resilience. (see **SDG 11**)
- Decreasing land and soil productivity can be a driver of environmental migration, both voluntary and forced. People may migrate in quest of a more livable environment, or move as a reaction to tensions posed by conflicts resulting from resource scarcities. (see **SDG 15**)

There is a need for comprehensive and concrete responses throughout the migration cycle, including measures to prevent forced migration related to resource scarcity, facilitating planned, safe movement away from degraded lands, and managing adaptation to allow people to stay, or return to, affected areas.

## 2. Conflict prevention and stabilisation

Over the past 20 years, stabilisation has become a central aspect of foreign – as well as military and development – policy. Stabilisation entails a focus on all sorts of violence, not just conflict, that creates political instability and harm, and a problem-solving approach that draws on various forms of intervention such as state-building, counterinsurgency, peacekeeping – to establish an enabling environment for peace and development. However, despite the current consensus that ‘conflict is development in reverse,’ i.e., insecurity contributes to underdevelopment and that efforts to restore stability in war-affected areas can establish conditions in which social and economic recovery and development can begin or resume, there are few links between stabilisation processes and SDG programming. This is in part because we often see stabilisation as a military-centric response. In reality, stabilisation does not pre-ordain any specific approaches or sectors involved. In fact, stabilisation efforts work as much through security-through-livelihood (development) and diplomacy as through defense. Taking advantage of the full potential of stabilisation requires moving beyond notions that stabilisation can involve ‘buying’ stability with humanitarian or development assistance in the absence of a meaningful diplomatic strategy. Instead,

## PREVENTION AND STABILISATION

DEPLETING NATURAL RESOURCES OR UNJUST MANAGEMENT CAN AGGRAVATE CONFLICTS AND UNDERMINE STABILISATION EFFORTS

stabilisation requires a combination of approaches, and we should understand it as the outcome of a combined, **multi-part strategy** rather than a stand-alone activity such as counterinsurgency or humanitarian relief. We have seen for example with the crisis in Mali or the Lake Chad region<sup>14</sup>, that military responses alone do not suffice and current wisdom highlights the importance of integrating livelihoods, gender and youth engagement programmes into stabilisation strategies to enhance their efficiency and sustainability. Thus, within the scope of stabilisation and conflict prevention, there is space and need for greater coordination of foreign policy and SDG engagement where they can have the best violence-reducing impact.

Countries affected by conflict and fragility often have the most limited capacities and resources, while facing the biggest political challenges. Processes that build upon existing awareness of context, build national ownership, foster transparency, secure support in the face of difficult choices and build consensus over trade-offs, are crucial. Conversely, tensions and local discontent can arise due to unsustainable practices that are having devastating environmental and social impacts on the local level. For the 2030 Agenda to move forward in fragile states, decision-making needs to address not only the technical, but also the political obstacles to development.

The implications of the SDGs under review on conflict prevention and stabilisation:

- Competing forms of land use (e.g., agriculture and resource extraction), competition over water, environmental pollution and degradation may trigger and aggravate conflicts and undermine stabilisation efforts. (see **SDG 6, 12 and 15**)
- Due recognition of the foreign policy entry points of energy transition can address conflict prevention and resilience building. Stabilisation activities can help introduce renewable energies and showcase how to move away from fossil fuels. Conversely, energy transition processes must support strong and just institutions to avoid any new forms of corruption. (see **SDG 7**)
- Shifting of power and resources from central governments to decentralised systems can alter rural-urban dynamics and can be destabilising without the necessary governance structures in place and enhanced coordination between the centre and the peripheries. (see **SDG 11**)
- Inherently political interactions and diplomatic networks make foreign policy a suitable driver of policy integration needed to enhance sustainable development in fragile states. Diplomats can help mainstream conflict-sensitive sustainability action into peacebuilding, humanitarian aid, and development cooperation. (see **SDG 17**)

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<sup>14</sup> Ladbury et al, 2016

### 3. Reducing humanitarian needs

Global humanitarian aid reached an all-time high of USD 27.3 billion in 2016. This still reflects a 40% shortfall in needs met, while the trend in humanitarian crises and aid requirements is projected to continue rising<sup>15</sup>. Since World War Two, humanitarian aid became a vital foreign policy instrument for many governments. But as the aid bills continue to increase beyond what donors can cover, there is more and more of an imperative for aid effectiveness, coherence, and coordination. The 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) was the most significant acknowledgement of this by the then UNSG, Ban Ki Moon. Despite WHS commitments to better link humanitarian aid and development, we do not see it reflected under the SDG framework or in the measurement of the progress of the SDGs.

The implications of the SDGs under review on reducing humanitarian needs:

- Water insecurity and bad water governance, including lack of transboundary water cooperation, can add to humanitarian pressures and emergencies, possibly developing into security challenges (see **SDG 6**).
- Access to sustainable energy can create empowering opportunities and bridge the humanitarian-development divide by improving livelihoods, food security, health, safety, education and the environment. Humanitarian operations offer entry points to move away from fossil fuel use and use renewables (see **SDG 7**).

### 4. Countering terrorism and violent extremism

Violent extremism is a global foreign policy concern. More than 40 countries have experienced at least one terrorist attack.<sup>16</sup> Progress on SDGs, particularly in countries that emerge from crisis and conflict, is undermined by such attacks. Governments across the world are spending increasingly large amounts of state revenue to deal with the threats and consequences of violent extremism, taking away resources from other activities. The growth and effects of violent extremism contribute to the hindrance or reversal of progress on the SDGs and may threaten development for decades to come. UNDP estimates that more than 33,300 people in Africa lost their lives in violent extremist attacks between 2011 and 2016<sup>17</sup>. Violent extremism continues to threaten to stunt development outcomes for generations to come. However, development activities (as underpinned by the SDGs) uniquely placed within the overall response architecture for tackling violent extremism, have an integral role to play in averting the threats posed by it.

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2017

<sup>16</sup> <http://economicsandpeace.org/reports/>

<sup>17</sup> United Nations Development Programme 2017

## HUMANITARIAN NEEDS

LACK OF HOLISTIC APPROACHES TO CRISES CAN ADD TO HUMANITARIAN PRESSURES AND FUEL SECURITY CHALLENGES

## TERRORISM

PROGRESS ON SDGS IS UNDERMINED BY VIOLENT EXTREMISM.

AT THE SAME TIME, POLITICAL MARGINALISATION, LIVELIHOOD INSECURITY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION ARE DRIVERS OF TERRORISM.

Development expertise and resourcing can be leveraged to help address structural drivers of terrorism and extremism such as political marginalisation, livelihood insecurity, and social exclusion. To support communities in implementing de-radicalization initiatives, we need to help them ensure that there is a socio-economical reintegration process in place for former members of violent extremist organizations<sup>18</sup>.

The implications of the SDGs under review on countering terrorism and violent extremism:

- Resource-related conflicts and social grievances can make parts of the population more receptive to terrorist recruitment. Non-state armed groups are likely to exploit the changing access to and availability of natural resources. For instance, where nomads clash with sedentary farmers, this adds to an already conflicting situation and undermines international efforts to de-radicalize communities and combat terrorism. (see **SDG 6, 12 and 15**)
- Rapid urbanisation in post-conflict societies is often linked to youth criminality and increased vulnerability of youth to illicit activities. Connecting the urban poor and those on the periphery of cities to the urban economy, its institutions, and services, is vital to improve livelihood security and address these risks. (see **SDG 11**)
- Natural resources, e.g., wildlife, wood or minerals, are often illegally sourced and traded by **violent organisations** as a source of income, becoming both a reason for the conflict and an enabling factor to sustain the fighting. (see **SDG 12 and 15**)

## 5. Promoting foreign trade and investment

External economic promotion is perhaps one of the primary foreign policy priorities of the majority of OECD countries. On the one hand, international trade is a crucial factor in economic output and safeguards many domestic jobs, while on the other, trade and global economic links create trust and help stabilise international relations and enable peace. Each of the SDGs affect the promotion of foreign trade and investment – at all points of the supply chain (e.g., ensuring the sustainable supply of resources such as timber or energy for production, promoting sustainable consumption), as well as in terms of ensuring the stability of markets and investment conditions (e.g. safe cities, effective institutions, partnerships between governments and private sector). Foreign trade and investment are also an integral part of peacebuilding and sustainable peace. Although the SDGs are intrinsically linked to any efforts to promote foreign trade and investment, these links do not reflect in foreign policy or SDG implementation.

## TRADE AND INVESTMENT

TRADE AND GLOBAL ECONOMIC LINKS CONSTITUTE A NETWORK OF INTER-DEPENDENCIES. THEY CREATE TRUST, HELP STABILISE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, AND ENABLE PEACE

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

The implications of the SDGs under review on promoting foreign trade and investment:

- Energy transition processes can help to form mutual interdependencies. Investments in energy transition may support foreign and trade interests of countries able to offer technological solutions and willing to cooperate and promote economic interdependencies. (see **SDG 7**)
- Consumption and production patterns entail a network of co-dependencies – both positive and negative. While global supply chains are very efficient, they also bear significant risks of supply shocks. These shocks need to be planned and accounted for and gradually reduced through trade and investment promotion. (see **SDG 12**)
- Companies will play a pivotal role in increasing the sustainability of consumption and production, e. g. respect human rights and consider the environmental footprint. Efforts from the US, the EU, and the OECD to increase due diligence of companies, for example companies operating in the business of so-called “conflict minerals”, are essential starting points. (see **SDG 12**)
- Foreign policy can play an important facilitating role for partnerships with investment institutions, the private sector, and civil society. (see **SDG 17**).
- Finally, achieving the SDGs requires a transformation of global trade and investment. International trade regulations and regional and bilateral trade relations need to promote the sustainable use of developing countries’ natural assets and provide them with a sound economic basis sustainable development, fostering local development. The coherence of investment and sustainability policies needs strengthening in areas of export promotion, investment protection, development and humanitarian finance. (see **SDG 17**)

## 6. Safeguarding geopolitical stability

From a geopolitical perspective, power relations and rivalries, often primarily between states but also among other actors of international politics, are shaped by territorial conditions, geography and resource base, and changes thereof<sup>19</sup>. Implementing SDGs will transform what natural resources we need, how we procure them and how these questions are governed, redrawing the global map of political influence. Foreign policy should ensure these changes do not create new threats to stability. Both, not implementing SDGs and implementing them without a proactive, foreign-policy driven approach, will have detrimental impacts on stability and peace. Therefore, foreign policy needs to anticipate and help steer the geopolitical implications of a sustainable transformation to minimise risk. Many sustainability issues such as water resource governance have a transboundary dimension. Here too, a strategic, diplomacy-driven approach embedded in the specific context of regional politics is essential rather than viewing

<sup>19</sup> Cohen 2003

## GEOPOLITICAL STABILITY

TRANSITIONING TO A MORE SUSTAINABLE WORLD WILL SHIFT INTERNATIONAL POWER RELATIONS AND DEPENDENCIES, AS SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES AND THEIR GOVERNANCE HAVE A TRANSBOUNDARY DIMENSION.

sustainable development topics as a technical issue confined to national borders. Essentially, foreign policy must consider how domestic and international efforts to achieve the SDGs will impact countries' external relations with one another and conditions of geopolitical stability.

The implications of the SDGs under review on safeguarding geopolitical stability:

- Energy transition processes will shift international power relations and dependencies: the decreasing global relevance of oil and gas and a growing resource input requirements the renewable technologies may reduce past conflicts, while also shaping new rivalries and tensions if governance of the transition processes is lacking. (see **SDG 7** and **SDG 12**)
- Different energy mix options may offer less reason for asymmetrical relationships between partners at the global energy map. As a result, geopolitical changes in many regional contexts are likely: with stabilising but potentially also destabilising effects if existing hegemony is usurped. (see **SDG 7**)
- Global supply chains bring significant risks in the form of supply shocks, and interdependent commodity prices transmit shocks across the system. Supply shocks can also increase the competition over resources between countries and lead to tensions over resource access. (see **SDG 12**)
- Transboundary cooperation is often essential for regional stability, and it needs a strategic diplomatic approach. Diplomats can and should try to help shape political thinking over national and regional development perspectives to help shift discourse and policy toward cooperation, drawing on their access, mandate, and skills of diplomacy. (see **SDG 6**)
- Arable land, ecosystem services, and commodity flows have geopolitical relevance in a world that transforming its resource cycles. Making international investment flows compatible with planetary boundaries will likely bring about the devaluation of many national assets and a major shift in economic structures in developing and fragile countries. Strengthening multilateral interaction is essential to be able to cope with this, making sure the international community comes together in the process instead of drifting apart. (see **SDG 17**)
- Foreign policy should contribute resilience and geopolitical perspectives to sustainable development activities to improve the *coherence of external action*. It should also aim to increase the understanding of how priorities of peace and stability interact with the implementation on the 2030 Agenda and identify appropriate responses. (see **SDG 17**)

## 4. Conclusions

The success of foreign policy activities, be it de-escalation of conflict, transboundary trade, stabilisation or conflict prevention, depends upon human development and resilient societies which can resolve disputes constructively. Many topics of the SDGs such as forest management, sustainable consumption and production and water resource governance have a transboundary dimension. Here, rather than viewing sustainable development topics as national, technical issues, a strategic, diplomacy-driven approach embedded in the specific context of regional politics is essential. As such, the SDGs are a prerequisite for successful foreign policy. Simultaneously, foreign policy is a necessary vehicle for achieving the SDGs.

Implementing the SDGs will alter geopolitical dynamics, and affect peace and stability. The SDG process is already transforming what natural resources we need, how we procure them and how these questions are governed, redrawing the global map of political influence. Shifting from fossil fuels to low-carbon economies, increasing agricultural yields and decentralising power to the sub-national level, overhauling resource supply chains to account for human rights, for example, will all shift power and political balances and alignments. Careful and deliberate diplomacy is required to ensure these changes do not create new threats to stability. Both, *not* implementing the SDGs and implementing them without a proactive, foreign-policy driven approach, will have detrimental impacts on a range of foreign policy areas including stability and peace. Therefore, foreign policy needs to anticipate and help steer the geopolitical implications of a sustainable transformation.

The range of diplomatic tools, such as mediation or initiation of international and multi-stakeholder partnerships, available to the foreign policy community thus play a significant role in ensuring the transformative shifts do not pose any harm – particularly in fragile states. Crucially, foreign policy must consider how domestic and international efforts to achieve the SDGs will impact countries' external relations with one another and conditions of geopolitical stability.

Based on this conclusion, we set out three steps for further action:

### **1. Analyse the consequences of SDG implementation and integrate SDGs into foreign policy strategies**

Policy responses and effective implementation of the SDGs requires cognisance of the politics and geopolitics which they affect and which affect them. All of the ostensibly 2030 Agenda related actions have geopolitical implications. Therefore, there needs to be a better understanding of the foreign policy implications of the SDGs to inform a specific "Sustainable Foreign Policy" approach to the SDGs. Implementing SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) and SDG 17 (global partnerships) offer the most obvious entry points, but this is relevant to every SDG.

## THREE AREAS FOR ACTION

- 1. ANALYSE AND INTEGRATE SDGS INTO FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGIES**
- 2. USE DIPLOMATIC TOOLS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**
- 3. INVEST IN COUNTERING FRAGILITY**

An important first step would be a rigorous and regular analysis of long-term projections on different levels and quality of SDG implementation on geopolitics. It would help identify risks, and potential black swans, as well as identify potential double-dividends of foreign policy and sustainable development goals, to better align strategies to enable greater future synergy.

Such an assessment should also examine how foreign policy instruments can (and do) support the SDGs and how foreign policy can be better structured (in terms of objectives and resources) around the SDGs. In practical terms, external action would benefit from identifying entry points to leverage their contribution to foreign policy goals, including peace (for example, a peace dividend achieved through the more equitable provision of basic services). Importantly, such an exercise should not just be the responsibility of the 'global issues' division of a foreign ministry but involve other technical directorates as well.

The outcome of such a process would provide an as yet lacking reference point to ensure that SDG progress does not inadvertently undermine foreign policy goals and that foreign policy can better contribute to the improvement of the SDGs. Such a process, aligning the SDGs with foreign policy, would give us a roadmap towards **"Sustainable Foreign Policy"**.

## **2. Employ the diplomatic toolbox for sustainable development**

The 2030 Agenda offers a framework for building global resilience to meet some of the significant challenges facing the world today such as forced migration, climate change, poverty, terrorism and violent conflict. These are global challenges for which we need multilateralism. We thus need multilateral tools to achieve these, and here foreign policy capacities are fundamental. All of the diplomatic toolboxes are relevant and should be made available:

- Diplomacy
- Partnerships
- Mediation
- Political Dialogue
- Financing
- Global governance

For example, foreign policy instruments such as bilateral trade agreements and special economic zones can help create incentives or establish conditions for cooperation regarding SDG implementation. Some cases are: promoting land reforms and participatory management, investing in land restoration, and promoting adherence to voluntary schemes such as the EU's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance, and Trade (FLEGT) or the Forest Stewardship Council's timber certification scheme.

Sustainable development is not merely a task for development policy, nor should it be left to specific technical sectors, such as environmental or water Ministries, to pursue discrete, sector-specific activities under siloed goals. There is a distinct role for foreign policy here, and

for leadership from the foreign policy community. We have seen from the success of the Paris Conference on climate change in 2015 that foreign policy engagement in key global processes catalyses action and provides high-level leadership. The SDGs require similar leadership. Examples could include:

- establishing a G7 and G20 initiative to support the 2030 agenda;
- a G7 and G20 statement to highlight the importance of multilateralism for the 2030 agenda;
- identification and support of three flagship initiatives in fragile states on three different continents to support fragile states in the implementation of the SDGs.

The future of sustainable development is one which of course cannot be decided in Europe or amongst G7 states alone. The 2030 Agenda, economic and social opportunities in Africa and free world trade are all issues that are high up on the G20 agenda. And while finding a shared approach amongst G20 countries will not be easy, it is an important step for global governance and effective multilateralism which could bring about policy coherence, provide direction and incentivise action.

### **3. Invest in countering fragility**

Investing in fragile states is where progress is the slowest, yet most needed. Progress on the SDGs, particularly in countries that emerge from crisis and conflict, is required to reinstate livelihoods, and eventually, strengthen resilience. However, this is not merely about piling up development demands on fragile states. There is also a role for foreign policy. Much foreign policy action is already taking place in fragile states, but this action does not sufficiently connect to the SDGs. Besides, much of this action is not adequately sensitive to the fragile context to not harm (i.e., conflict sensitive). Therefore, in addition to the better alignment of foreign policy with the SDGs in fragile states, the modes of action should also be conflict sensitive to ensure that the progress made by the SDGs are not inadvertently undermined.

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## **Annex**

In the annex, we provide a more detailed analysis of the SDGs under review. Please download the annex from [www.climate-diplomacy.org/publications](http://www.climate-diplomacy.org/publications).

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# ANNEX: A FOREIGN POLICY PERSPECTIVE ON THE SDGS

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1<sup>ST</sup> DRAFT, AS OF JULY 16, 2018

*In this annex, we provide a more detailed analysis of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under review at the High-level Political Forum 2018 and their links to peace and stability.*

## SDG6 WATER

*Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all*

Water is a matter of survival and plays a critical role in social, economic and environmental activities as well. With a rise in global demand for water, water crises have consistently featured among the World Economic Forum's top global impact risks. Water insecurity, i.e., the lack of water availability for basic human needs and socio-economic development, undermines billions of livelihoods and poses significant risks for peace and prosperity by thwarting progress and fuelling displacement and conflict.

### **The critical importance of water for core foreign policy objectives**

Water insecurity fuels displacement and instability and adds to humanitarian pressures (see target 6.1: achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all). By increasing health risks, undermining food security and limiting economic opportunities, lack of water for drinking incentivizes people to move and may fuel grievances in host communities. More broadly, it can also undermine governmental legitimacy, which has strong linkages to water management since the dawn of civilization in irrigation-focused kingdoms in the Middle East, Egypt, and China.

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### **THE CYCLE OF WATER INSECURITY AND FRA- GILITY...**

**...HAS TWO DIMEN-  
SIONS: THE SHORTER-  
TERM FAILURE TO WA-  
TER AVAILABILITY AND  
THE LONGER-TERM  
FAILURE TO PRESERVE  
WATER RESOURCES.**



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Water insecurity negatively impacts across many SDGs, notably on health, but, by way of coping mechanisms that often see girls spend a lot of time on fetching water, also on education and gender equality. It is particularly problematic in countries and situations of fragility.

By placing additional pressure on weak institutions, water insecurity further undermines the social compact. This can fuel a downward spiral as increasing fragility makes it even more challenging to achieve water security. The cycle of water insecurity and fragility has two dimensions: the short-term failure to water availability (e.g. to adequately supply displaced persons, or pastoralists' animals) and the long-term failure to preserve water resources, e.g. in the form of over-pumping or pollution of groundwater that ultimately undermines livelihoods<sup>1</sup>. For example, the International Organization of Migration found that water insecurity was a key reason for internal displacement in many Iraqi governorates<sup>2</sup>.

The importance of water resource sustainability is directly related to integrated water resources management. The cue on transboundary cooperation in target 6.5 is particularly relevant for foreign policymakers because transboundary cooperation is often essential for regional stability, but also a precondition for sustainable and equitable management of the water-energy-food nexus. Many of the most worrying water conflicts are a function of difficult trade-offs related to the question of whether to prioritize water use for energy (hydropower) or food (irrigation) production. Hence, water links intimately with the SDGs on poverty, hunger, energy, and peace.

Transboundary water cooperation offers significant opportunities for both upstream and downstream countries. Dams constructed in upstream countries for hydropower production, for example, can simultaneously help control downstream floods, improve downstream navigation, and increase the potential for downstream hydropower by stabilizing water flows—and may also offer downstream countries cheap electricity import options. In reality, however, dam construction in upstream countries often leads to conflict with downstream neighbours who fear the consequences of flow changes and the potential political lever against them in the hands of upstream countries. Although such conflicts are unlikely to escalate into international wars, they fuel tensions and hinder cooperation in other sectors, hampering economic development as well as sustainable and equitable water use.

#### **Illustration: conflict and cooperation over water use in Central Asia**

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Aral Sea basin has witnessed significant conflict over water. Upstream countries inherited big reservoirs that had been built to boost downstream irrigation. However, losing access to cheap energy post-independence has nudged them to prioritize water release for hydropower generation in

<sup>1</sup> Sadoff et al. 2017

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## **TRANSBOUNDARY WATER COOPERATION...**

**... OFFERS SIGNIFICANT OPPORTUNITIES FOR BOTH UPSTREAM AND DOWNSTREAM COUNTRIES.**

winter rather than downstream irrigation in summer. Uzbekistan, which is mainly dependent on irrigation, has reacted with punitive measures and vehemently opposed the construction of additional upstream dams, going as far as to threaten military action. Limitations in cooperation have cost all Central Asian countries dearly<sup>3</sup>. Yet, a recent change in Uzbekistan's leadership led to the embrace of a new foreign policy doctrine focusing on regional cooperation, transcending competition over resources and unlocking opportunities for mutually beneficial partnership.

### **International efforts to improve water governance**

Given the critical importance of water and its interlinkages with overarching global objectives such as stability and prosperity, it may be surprising that there is no integrated international regime on freshwater governance. There exists a well-established normative framework that can help foreign policy makers situate their efforts, in particular, the 1997 UN Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses that went into effect in 2014 after reaching 35 ratifications. Although it built on decades of work in the International Law Commission, primarily sought to codify customary law, and achieved widespread support in the UN General Assembly, the number of ratifications has remained limited due to concerns that it might restrict development options. A second convention by the UN Economic Commission for Europe, the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, has since 2016 opened for global accession. There is a broad 'epistemic community' of water managers underpinning these conventions who largely subscribe to the principles of 'Integrated Water Resources Management.' It is defined by the Global Water Partnership as "a process which promotes the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources, to maximize the resultant economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems."

Although water is a critical issue all around the world, its management is often primarily a local challenge. As these challenges differ across (sub-) basins, it is the governance responses at these levels rather than global agreements which are most important for securing peace, prosperity, and equity. Thus, whereas foreign policy can play a helpful role in advocating for recognition of the principles underlying the global conventions, it is even more crucial that it use its influence to help shift discourse and policy toward cooperation at the sub-basin level. Such collaboration often depends on the perceived political risks of water cooperation, rather than the lack of economic incentives<sup>4</sup>. Diplomats can and should try to help shape political thinking over national and regional development perspectives with an aim of shifting such perceptions, drawing on their access, mandate, and skills of persuasion. For third parties seeking to foster cooperation, this means em-

<sup>3</sup> Pohl et al. 2017

<sup>4</sup> Subramanian et al. 2012

## **FOREIGN POLICY CAN...**

**...PLAY A HELPFUL ROLE IN ADVOCATING FOR RECOGNITION OF THE PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING THE GLOBAL CONVENTIONS AND HELP SHIFT DISCOURSE AND POLICY TOWARD COOPERATION AT THE (SUB) BASIN LEVEL.**

bracing water management as primarily a foreign policy issue, which technical development cooperation can support<sup>5</sup>. A broad toolbox – from facilitating private discussions between decision-shapers to identify mutually beneficial development paths and narratives, to reducing risks by offering guarantees or joint assessments – has been developed<sup>6</sup>, but it often needs the political impetus and diplomatic skillset that foreign policy can provide.

### **Conclusion**

Conflicts over lack of access to water at both individual and state level can undermine global and national foreign policy priorities, in particular, the prevention of displacement and the maintenance of regional stability. Achieving SDG 6 also entails transformational possibilities, regarding unlocking human potential (avoiding illness, reducing gender discrimination and unlocking time for education and productive endeavours) and inter-state cooperation. Moreover, better water management is a facilitator if not a precondition for achieving numerous other SDGs, which in turn are harbingers of fundamental progress.

As developments in Central Asia illustrate, foreign policy can play a critical role in overcoming zero-sum competition over water and enabling beneficial cooperation by helping rethink and reframe issues. However, to realize this potential water diplomacy needs more agency and more constructive political engagement that will help embed technical transboundary cooperation into attractive regional development narratives and pathways. Since achieving SDG 6 is an essential element of the quest for international security, and that political engagement is often a necessary element to progress in water management, diplomats should embrace water diplomacy and help build the agreements to underpin better water management.

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<sup>5</sup> Pohl et al. 2014

<sup>6</sup> cf. Leb et al. 2018

# SDG7 ENERGY

*Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all*



Limited access to energy is a significant barrier to development and holds back efforts to improve living conditions in developing and emerging economies. Around the world, 1.1 billion people still do not have access to electricity, and 2.8 billion still rely on animal and crop waste, wood, charcoal and other solid fuels to cook their food and heat their homes<sup>7</sup>.

Dependency on fossil fuels for energy also presents significant challenges for sustainable development. With the emission from burning oil, gas, and coal being a major driver of climate change, these forms of energy are increasing the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, such as hurricanes and tsunamis, as well as droughts and other slower processes of environmental degradation, which exacerbate water, food, and livelihood insecurity<sup>8</sup>. Around 18.8 million people were displaced by disasters in 2017, compared to 11.8 million displaced by conflict and violence<sup>9</sup>, and climate change impacts are estimated to push an additional 100 million people into extreme poverty by 2030 if countries do not show greater ambition in pursuing low-carbon development<sup>10</sup>.

## **The links between energy and foreign policy**

SDG 7 interlinks strongly with a range of key foreign policy priorities. This holds true for preventing conflicts and instability, for building the resilience of vulnerable communities and countries, and for reinforcing international cooperation through stronger trade and investments relations among partners.

Varying national contexts mean that each country will follow a different path as it implements measures to provide universal energy access (target 7.1), the expansion of renewable energy (target 7.2), and greater energy efficiency (target 7.3). As such, these varying transition pathways will differ significantly in their relevance for foreign policy and require appropriate responses. A nation's energy mix, its economic dependence on its fossil fuel industries, and the potential impact of moving away from domestic high carbon energy sources for energy independence and imports all have significant implications for how different domestic and international players and stakeholders will respond to the implementation and therefore to the peace potential of SDG 7.

<sup>7</sup> IEA 2018

<sup>8</sup> Rüttinger et al. 2015

<sup>9</sup> IDMC 2018

<sup>10</sup> Hallegatte et al. 2016

**SUSTAINABLE ENERGY IS STRONGLY INTER-LINKED WITH KEY FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES...**

**...SUCH AS PREVENTING CONFLICTS AND INSTABILITY, BUILDING THE RESILIENCE OF VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES, AND REINFORCING INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION.**

Most countries will have to make structural changes to their economies to diversify and decarbonise their energy supplies. These will not only go hand in hand with significant shifts in policy, politics, and society at the national level – which could have implications in more fragile, conflict-prone regions. Whether a country is a net importer or exporter of fossil fuels, we can also expect the process of decarbonisation to reconfigure their energy relations with other countries, and therefore have a significant impact on foreign policy. Moreover, reduced consumption of fossil fuels has the potential to reduce the overall relevance of oil and gas in the present and the future conflicts. However, the expansion of renewable energy technologies is generating major demand for new types of raw materials and resources – mainly with the establishment of new infrastructure– and this could create new conflict constellations if governance processes to manage the transition process are lacking.

### **The critical importance of energy for core foreign policy objectives**

Achieving the targets under SDG 7 can serve core foreign policy objectives by strengthening humanitarian responses, reducing forced migration, and strengthening trade and investment – all of which have implications for the stability of fragile countries and regions.

Regarding **humanitarian responses**, increasing access to clean energy sources can help vulnerable communities to become more self-sufficient, and thus play a role in bridging the gap between humanitarian aid and development cooperation by improving livelihoods, health, safety, education, food security and nutrition, and the environment. Providing access to renewable energy sources can empower communities. From off-grid solar systems for remote rural villages to reduced fossil-fuel import needs for small island nations, installing renewable energy technologies creates opportunities by providing people with independent energy access and, potentially, new sources of income.

These clean energy technologies also create a variety of co-benefits alongside improving energy access and reducing carbon emissions. To take two examples, compared to fossil fuels, they produce minimal air pollution and therefore improve the health of the surrounding population. In communities that have traditionally burned wood for cooking and heating, energy efficient cooking stoves reduce the need for firewood and prevent deforestation.

Improving access to clean energy can also significantly **improve the lives of migrants** – both by improving the conditions in refugee camps and other types of temporary accommodation and by alleviating pressures that may force them to leave their homes in the first place. Kelly T. Clements, the Deputy United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, has noted that: “Universal access to clean energy could vastly improve the health and well-being of millions of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons.” For example, solar-powered street lighting systems have been installed in many refugee camps, improving the safety, living conditions, and livelihood prospects of those residing there.

**PROVIDING ACCESS...**

**TO RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCES CAN EMPOWER COMMUNITIES.**

**CLEAN ENERGY...**

**...CAN SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVE THE LIVES OF MIGRANTS.**

Further, reducing energy sector GHG emissions is crucial to climate change mitigation efforts, and therefore to reduce the role of environmental changes in **decisions to migrate**. With both sudden and slow-onset impacts, climate change can be considered the ultimate “threat multiplier.” More frequent and severe extreme weather events will displace people in greater numbers, while more gradual environmental degradation will intensify competition for resources, such as water and fertile land, thereby increasing livelihood insecurity, the potential for conflict and other drivers that force people to move. German Foreign Minister Maas has stressed that Germany’s campaign “around the world for a shift towards sustainable energy production” is a response to the adverse impacts of climate change on many societies.

Energy relations often form a core component of the ties between countries (see target 7.a). The transition to low-carbon energy supply is therefore highly likely to **reconfigure existing partnerships and create new mutual interdependencies**. For example, countries that have already developed significant expertise on clean technology and innovation can come together with those urgently looking to increase access to clean energy (see target 7.b).

As renewable energy sources offer countries a greater variety of options to independently diversify their energy mix, they may reduce the reliance of many countries on energy imports, thus altering the balance of power in relations between energy exporters and importers. This raises the possibility of geopolitical changes in many regional contexts, with stabilising but also potentially destabilising effects.

**Illustration: exporting the energy transition made in Germany**

The ambition that Germany has shown in expanding the use of renewable energy technologies at home has also had a profound impact on its foreign policy interests. In pioneering and promoting an innovative new regulatory mechanism for boosting renewable energy financing, the feed-in tariff, the country rapidly increased the diversity of its energy mix, decreased its dependency on energy imports, and gained an early economic and technological advantage in core sectors for low-carbon energy transition. These steps have provided new avenues for developing long-term trade and investment partnerships with other countries. Further, in significantly expanding renewables, it supported the decentralisation of its energy infrastructure, thus reducing Germany’s vulnerability to external shocks, such as interruptions to gas imports and blackouts as a result of extreme weather events or terrorist attacks.

**Illustration: using renewable energy to support stabilisation processes in South Sudan**

Although renewable energy technologies are rapidly becoming more affordable, they largely still have not reached fragile, conflict-prone countries like South Sudan (see target 7.b). Humanitarian operations may offer entry points to help the country reduce the use of fossil fuels like diesel and take advantages of the benefits and co-benefits of re-

**RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCES...**

**...CAN ALTER THE BALANCE OF POWER IN RELATIONS BETWEEN ENERGY EXPORTERS AND IMPORTERS.**

renewable energy sources instead. As explained above, by expanding and diversifying its energy sector and reducing its dependence on the fossil fuel sector, South Sudan could achieve significant development gains. These could, in turn, play a role in stabilising the country, providing a peace dividend. Alongside humanitarian organisations, small-scale off-grid renewable energy systems can strengthen the operations of health facilities and NGOs hubs that work in conflict-prone areas.

### **International efforts to promote sustainable energy**

There is no global regime for energy transition processes yet. However, there is a broad spectrum of governance arrangements to guide or inform this process. The international climate negotiations under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – including the important Paris Agreement – have been a significant reference point for energy transition targets for decades. Given the significance of sustainable energy targets for achieving the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), the climate-energy nexus has been embedded in many national policy processes and can also help to address some of the financing challenges for investing in sustainable energy infrastructures. However, sustainable energies have become a primary focus of international initiatives beyond the climate policy arena – a prominent example being the establishment of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), which has led to increasing international recognition for the topic. The Clean Energy Ministerial for key economies covers different elements of the energy transition process including energy efficiency. Finally, various dialogue formats have been used to systematically raise awareness about the foreign policy co-benefits of improving clean energy access, and to explore the potential for bilateral partnerships and other models for strengthening cooperation. These include the SEforAll Forum, the International Forum on Energy for Sustainable Development, the Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week and the Vienna Energy Forum.

### **Conclusion**

Conflicts over energy or a lack of access to it – whether at individual and state level – can affect foreign policy priorities. Both prevention and resilience building can be strengthened by carefully considering the foreign policy entry points for supporting low-carbon energy transition. Foreign policy has a critical role to play in overcoming a lack of access to energy and enabling beneficial cooperation, by supporting processes of energy diversification and transition. Investments in clean energy sources and expanding energy access not only help to improve governmental legitimacy and strengthen the social contract; they may also support the foreign policy and trade interests of countries like Germany, which are in a position to offer technological solutions and are willing to enter into bilateral and multilateral cooperation to promote economic interdependencies.

**THERE IS A BROAD SPECTRUM OF GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS...**

**...TO GUIDE OR INFORM A GLOBAL ENERGY TRANSITION IN THE CLIMATE POLICY ARENA AS WELL AS BEYOND IT.**

# SDG 11 CITIES

*Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*

In an increasingly urbanised world, global resilience cannot be achieved without cities. Separating a local from a national or international sustainability issue is increasingly difficult – be it climate change, migration, or economic development. 42 of the world's 100 largest economies are cities<sup>11</sup>. Local and subnational governments change the landscape of international relations by increasingly participating in global city networks and even signing international agreements<sup>12</sup>. At the same time, decentralisation does not necessarily contribute to peace and stability. Such a transition requires the right governance structures to be in place and calls for much stronger policy coordination between central government and decentralised structures. Cities face some of the most challenging trends: rising inequality, population growth, human mobility and natural disaster risks often converge in urban settings. But cities also have the potential to become laboratories for coping with these pressures in innovative ways.

## The critical importance of cities for core foreign policy objectives

Around the world, cities become increasingly crucial for national security and stability. Where vulnerability, economic and political relevance and global pressures converge, fragile cities can pose a threat to the stability of entire countries. **City fragility** is not a steady state but occurs due to an aggregation of risks and stresses. Several factors can have a destabilising effect on cities, including the level of inequality, unemployment, crime, pollution, rapid urban population growth, conflict events, and natural hazards. Literature suggests that more cities are fragile than expected. While high levels of city fragility occur primarily in low-income and conflict-affected settings (especially in Asia and Africa), where the pace of urbanisation is fastest, urban fragility is also observable in medium and high-income countries. For instance, over half of European cities have a medium level of fragility<sup>13</sup>.

Cities already host more than half of the world's population, and much of the **population growth** will take place in urban settings in low and middle-income countries across the global South<sup>14</sup>. By 2050, 70% of the global population will live in cities<sup>15</sup>. These developments often go along with weak governance, poverty, inequality, and marginalisation, decreasing cities resilience to shocks and pressures. While the economic success of cities is often highlighted, the decrease in global



## CONVERGING PRESSURES ...

... INCLUDING INEQUALITY, UNEMPLOYMENT, CRIME, POLLUTION, RAPID URBAN POPULATION GROWTH, CONFLICT EVENTS, AND NATURAL HAZARDS CAN INCREASE URBAN FRAGILITY.

<sup>11</sup> Toly and Tabory 2016

<sup>12</sup> Tavares 2016

<sup>13</sup> Muggah 2016

<sup>14</sup> UN 2014

<sup>15</sup> FAO 2017

poverty rates is accompanied by growing income inequalities in 75% of the world's cities in the last two decades<sup>16</sup>. Many cities cannot provide enough jobs and livelihoods for growing populations. Moreover, much of the urban growth is expected in **informal settlements** (see target 11.1), where almost one billion people live today. Here, provision of basic rights and services like water, energy, and housing is even more challenging for municipal authorities, which affects many dimensions of the wellbeing of the inhabitants. There is emerging literature showing a relationship between political and economic exclusion experienced by the urban poor and the propensity to be recruited by criminal entities.

The concentration of the population, economic activity, and infrastructure also means that the **impact of environmental change** can be especially devastating in cities. Projections from the UN and other international bodies point to increased frequency and severity of natural disasters occurring in towns and cities (see target 11.5). The impacts of climate change are likely to be compounded by existing vulnerabilities in urban areas. This presents a significant challenge for the international development and humanitarian system; both in the scale and complexity of responding to urban development and disasters and in operating in an environment in which traditional humanitarian actors do not have significant experience and expertise. The built environment and urban planning can play an essential role in the fostering of inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities. For example, green urban planning (see target 11.7) has been shown to effectively support adaptation through controlling urban flooding. However, there is a lack of understanding of what these spaces should look like, how they should be developed, and who they should be created by and for whom, especially in fragile and conflict-affected urban settings.

Another significant trend that converges in cities is **migration**. While many developed countries are already highly urbanised, in developing countries urbanisation will continue due to rural-urban migration.<sup>1</sup> We will see increased rural-urban movement within countries, for example, due to decreasing agricultural productivity, more labour migration, and more frequent or longer lasting circular migration patterns. Already today disasters and violence have caused 50 percent of a total of 51 million refugees and internally displaced persons to flee to urban areas<sup>17</sup>. With more people moving to cities, and with many cities already facing increased vulnerability to climate and disaster risks as well as experiencing existing social, economic and political fragility, these dynamics will be a major determinant of urban resilience. For instance, a disproportionate share of slum/shack dwellers are migrants<sup>18</sup> and are exposed to more significant climate change impacts<sup>19</sup>.

## WITH MORE PEOPLE MOVING TO CITIES...

...AND WITH MANY CITIES ALREADY FACING INCREASED VULNERABILITY TO CLIMATE AND DISASTER RISKS AS WELL AS FRAGILITY, THESE DYNAMICS WILL BE A MAJOR DETERMINANT OF URBAN RESILIENCE.

<sup>16</sup> UN-Habitat 2016

<sup>17</sup> De Boer 2015

<sup>18</sup> IOM 2015

<sup>19</sup> UN DESA 2013

### **Illustration: converging pressures in urban areas of Guatemala**

How cities manage the converging pressures will be crucial for stabilisation and countering non-state armed groups. Rapid urbanisation in post-conflict societies with rural youth migrating to the cities is often linked to youth criminality and their increased vulnerability to illicit activities. In Guatemala, rural-urban migration is already putting a strain on the receiving urban areas. Many of the urban areas are largely dominated by youth street gangs ('pandillas' or 'maras') that create a culture of violence. While urban security and anti-crime policies are needed to address this, they are not enough. Connecting the urban poor and those on the periphery of cities to the urban economy, its institutions, governance systems, and services, will be the key to improving livelihood security (see targets 11.1, 11.2, 11.3, 11.a). Some cities already have valuable lessons to share. For instance, the city of Medellin - once one of the most fragile and dangerous cities of the world - has increased urban resilience by expanding public transport to connect formerly neglected areas with the rest of the city and reinstalling social services in these areas.

### **International efforts to improve urban governance**

On the global level, several frameworks now exist along with the 2030 Agenda that offer some real opportunities to promote resilience: the Sendai Framework for Action, the New Urban Agenda and the UN Peacebuilding Commission's Sustaining Peace Agenda. The international community needs to maximise the synergies between these frameworks and to close the gaps with regards to cities, sustainability challenges, and fragility. Foreign policy can help promote this, putting urban fragility risks on the agenda.

Integrated perspectives and approaches to urban development and planning and management that cut across thematic silos and maximise synergies between different sectors will be the keys to improving urban resilience (see target 11.b). Sustainable and resilient urban development requires municipal authorities to plan in a long-term, inclusive and integrated way to overcome silos. It is important to take into account the people, the problems, and the trade-offs that come with 'nexus' approaches. However, in fragile cities, these processes or capacity to implement these processes are often absent or weak, so financial and technical assistance in this area is needed (see target 11.c). At the same time, humanitarian and development agencies might also need to make their approaches more integrated and suitable to the urban level.

Global and national efforts to address conflict and fragility risks must be transposed to the urban scale, as highlighted by SDG11. For this, dynamic multi-level approaches involving all key stakeholders in processes relating to urban development are imperative (see target 11.3). In the humanitarian realm, the need for greater localisation was recognised at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. It will require a transformation of the way in which the UN system and many donor agencies operate, and it will need greater contextual knowledge of city actors - mayors, urban dwellers, municipalities and urban conflict

## **SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT URBAN DEVELOPMENT...**

**... REQUIRES MUNICIPAL AUTHORITIES TO PLAN IN A LONG-TERM, INCLUSIVE AND INTEGRATED WAY. HOWEVER, IN FRAGILE CITIES, THESE PROCESSES ARE OFTEN ABSENT OR WEAK.**

dynamics. Sustained engagement with civil society and local communities – with an acknowledgment of the highly heterogeneous nature of urban communities and recognising the multiple identity interests an individual or group may hold – will be particularly valuable in urban environments.

Foreign policy can help leverage the potential of city networks to contribute to sustainable development effectively. In recent years, the number of international city associations has proliferated (more than 125 at present), including ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), Cities Alliance and C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group (C40)<sup>20</sup>. While their work in the areas of sustainability and climate was for a long time the most visible, topics such as peacebuilding are gaining traction – a recent study found that 10.6% of networks engage with this topic. Expanding the focus of city networks to address issues related to security, resilience, and fragility more broadly could be beneficial<sup>21</sup>. The Municipal Alliance for Peace in the Middle East, which fosters cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian municipalities, is an example of such an effort.

### **Conclusion**

Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable as mandated by SGD11 is a tremendous opportunity to contribute to peace. Foreign policy should both look at urban fragility risks in detail and seek to leverage municipal agency to build resilience. For this, connecting policy processes in different sectors, coordinating action on multiple levels of governance and adapting approaches to urban settings, putting a strong emphasis on inclusion of vulnerable urban dwellers, remains imperative.

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<sup>20</sup> Tavares 2016

<sup>21</sup> Acuto and Rayner 2016

# SDG 12 CONSUMPTION & PRODUCTION

*Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns*

Resource consumption has grown exponentially over the past: between 1970 and 2010, the quantity of extracted materials has tripled<sup>22</sup>. Not only the overall amount of resources extracted and consumed has risen rapidly, but also the diversity of resources has grown. While half a century ago, only a few materials such as wood, brick, iron, copper, and plastics were in high demand worldwide, today products are more complex and require a wide range of materials.

The consumption of extracted natural resources is divided unequally across the globe. North America and Europe have a very high material footprint, ranging between 20 and 27 tonnes per capita in 2010. In contrast, the material footprint of all other world regions was below 10 tonnes per capita. In Africa, it was even smaller than 3 tonnes per capita<sup>23</sup>.

The largest share of the extractive activities takes place in regions where the material footprint is low, especially in Asia and the Pacific and Latin America. In these regions, the increased demand for raw materials has led to an expansion of extraction frontiers as many countries started or increased the exploitation of natural resources. Although it offered an opportunity to increase revenue and boost the export of primary commodities, it also meant that resource extraction is increasingly happening in remote, ecologically sensitive or politically unstable regions where environmental and social standards are often either lacking or poorly implemented<sup>24</sup>. At the same time, there has also been an increase in the mining of ore with low metal content, which often involves increased use of energy, water, and chemicals.

## **The critical importance of sustainable consumption and production patterns for core foreign policy objectives**

From a foreign policy perspective, sustainable consumption and production patterns are vital in ensuring stable and peaceful development. Food, water, energy and extractive resources such as metals and minerals are the basis for our livelihoods and economies.

Overconsumption and unsustainable practices are having devastating environmental and social impacts on the local level, increasingly leading to tensions and conflicts. Tensions and local discontent arise because of various reasons: competition between different forms of land

<sup>22</sup> UNEP 2016

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Stahr et al. 2016



**RESOURCE CONSUMPTION HAS GROWN EXPONENTIALLY...**

**... AND EXTRACTION IS INCREASINGLY HAPPENING IN REMOTE, ECOLOGICALLY SENSITIVE OR POLITICALLY UNSTABLE REGIONS.**

use (e.g., agriculture and resource extraction), water availability, pollution and environmental degradation, and displacement. Often the benefits are not distributed in a fair way, and working conditions at extraction sites are harsh beyond acceptance<sup>25</sup>.

On the global level, consumption and production patterns have increased in complexity and woven a network of co-dependencies. While global supply chains have improved efficiency, they also bear significant risks regarding supply shocks<sup>26</sup>. At the same time, commodity prices have become more interdependent. Price spikes in the oil and gas sector, whether caused by weather events or political crisis, affect prices of food and other sectors that rely on oil and gas, transmitting shocks across the system. Food price shocks can, in turn, contribute to political instability as seen during the food price crisis of 2008/9 and 2010/11 when high food prices sparked protests around the world. At the same time, supply shocks can increase the competition over resources between countries and lead to tensions over resource access.

Thus, improving the sustainability of resource extraction, production, and consumption does not only ensure the wellbeing and sustainable development of resource producing and consuming countries. From a peace and conflict perspective, these activities can also play an important role in minimizing negative environmental and social impacts and preventing conflicts and tensions that might follow. This links directly to SDG targets 12.1 and 2 that aim at improving sustainable consumption and production by implementing a “10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production, all countries taking action, with developed countries taking the lead, taking into account the development and capabilities of developing countries” and “by 2030 achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources”.

Companies will play a pivotal role in increasing the sustainability of consumption and production as outlined in SDG target 12.6. It encourages “companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle.” Efforts from the US, the EU, and the OECD to increase due diligence of companies mainly related to the so-called conflict minerals are essential starting points.

SDG 12 is a cross-cutting goal which relates to almost all other SDGs. The most apparent links are with those goals addressing specific resources such as food, energy, and water. For example, SDG 2 “Zero Hunger” calls for the resilience of global supply chains and the reduction of price volatility in its target 2.b to “correct and prevent trade restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets” and target 2.c to “adopt measures to ensure the proper functioning of food commodity markets and their derivatives and facilitate timely access to

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Rüttinger and Sharma 2016

## **IMPROVING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF RESOURCE EXTRACTION, PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION...**

**...CAN PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN MINIMIZING NEGATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL IMPACTS AND PREVENTING CONFLICTS AND TENSIONS THAT MIGHT FOLLOW.**

market information, including on food reserves, in order to help limit extreme food price volatility.”

### **Illustration: conflicts around extractives in the DRC and Peru**

The case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where government forces, neighbouring countries, and several militia groups fight for dominance, and where both - state and non-state armed groups - use minerals to fund the conflicts, shows how unsustainable consumption and production patterns are linked to violence and undermine stabilisation efforts<sup>27</sup>.

However, also more stable countries such as Peru and Indonesia face high levels of violence and conflict on the local level. For instance, both the attempts by the Peruvian government to formalise the artisanal gold mining in the Amazon region and to suppress the protests of Andean communities against large-scale mining projects have led to the dire confrontation of the population with the security forces. While this might not escalate into more large-scale violence, it does create pockets of fragility within states. The state of emergency was declared in several Andean provinces of Peru twice (in 2011 and 2012) after violent protests against the Conga project<sup>28</sup>.

### **International efforts to improve governance of resource extraction**

The international governance landscape on extractive resources (minerals, metals and fossil fuels) is fragmented. There is no overall framework or convention, similar to the three UN “Rio” Conventions – on Biodiversity, Climate Change, and Desertification. The existing conventions focus on specific resources and issues: for instance, the Minamata Convention on Mercury aims at minimising the adverse effects of this metal by seeking to control various products and processes in which it is used, including artisanal and small-scale gold mining. Furthermore, a number of international conventions and frameworks on human rights, labour standards, and the environment exist that are relevant and cover specific aspects of sustainable consumption and production, for example Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Rio Conventions mentioned above, the ILO Conventions, the Convention on Wetlands (or Ramsar Convention).

Financial organisations have played an essential role in ensuring certain fundamental human rights, labour, and environmental standards. In particular, the standards set by the International Finance Cooperation and the World Bank have had a global impact, and therefore an increasing number of banks and financial institutions are using them. In recent years, due diligence in supply chains and in particular regarding minerals and conflict financing has been a very dynamic policy field. Legislation in the US and Europe has been passed to improve the responsible sourcing of minerals of tin, tantalum, tungsten, and gold.

<sup>27</sup> BSR 2010

<sup>28</sup> Carbonell 2015

## **THE INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE LANDSCAPE...**

**...ON EXTRACTIVE RESOURCES (MINERALS, METALS AND FOSSIL FUELS) IS FRAGMENTED.**

The OECD has issued guidance documents supporting the implementation of these standards.

Furthermore, a broad spectrum of public-private sector standard initiatives and certification schemes emerged to promote the sustainable production and use of specific renewable and non-renewable resources<sup>29</sup>. While some standard initiatives and certification schemes for renewable resources such as the Forest Stewardship Council or Fair Trade have been around for over 20 years, these initiatives have been expanding in the past ten years to non-renewable resources, for example with the Aluminium Stewardship Initiative.

### **Conclusion**

As countries are transitioning to greener and more sustainable technologies and lifting themselves out of poverty, resource consumption will continue to grow. Improving the sustainability of consumption and production patterns will be vital in ensuring that these transition processes do not create new tensions and challenges. Foreign policy makers and diplomats have several entry points that can help prevent the risks that unsustainable production and consumption patterns create. On the global level, foreign policy and diplomats can play an important role in consolidating the fragmented governance landscape in particular regarding extractive resources. The goal would be to mitigate conflict risks on the local level by improving social and environmental standards, and ensuring the participation of affected population groups, and on the global level to improve the overall resilience of supply chains against supply shocks and crisis.

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<sup>29</sup> Kickler and Franken 2017

# SDG 15 LIFE ON LAND



*Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss*

Around 1.6 billion people depend on forests for their livelihood, and about 2.6 billion people rely directly on agriculture.<sup>30</sup> Deforestation, land degradation, and unsustainable management of ecosystems threaten those livelihoods and may contribute to resource-related conflicts and social unrest. Shrinking spaces and unjust tenure systems can make parts of the population more receptive to terrorist recruitment or force people to migrate away from places that are no longer hospitable. Sustainable land and forest management thus needs to be an essential part of SDG16 activities on peace, justice, and good institutions.

## **The critical importance of land, forest, and biodiversity for core foreign policy objectives**

As deserts spread, partly due to a changing climate, food insecurity and competition for the remaining fertile land increase. When forests stop providing fibre, fuelwood, shelter, and habitat for wildlife, rural livelihoods fall under pressure. When corrupt elites prevent efforts to manage resources better and share the benefits of the land and the forest equally, social and political conflicts loom. In Sudan, Somalia or the Lake Chad Basin where nomads clash with sedentary farmers, these processes add to an already conflicting and chaotic situation and hence undermine international efforts to de-radicalize communities and combat terrorism. Non-state armed groups are likely to exploit the changing access to and availability of natural resources. Decreasing land and soil productivity may also become one of the drivers of environmental migration, both voluntary and forced. People may migrate in quest of a more liveable and less vulnerable environment<sup>31</sup>, or move as a reaction to risks and tensions posed by conflicts resulting from resource scarcities<sup>32</sup>.

Fragile societies with weak economic foundations and insufficient state services, where conflicts are latent or manifest, are much more vulnerable to such environmental degradation - be it barren land or loss of forests and species. At the same time, the challenges of implementing SDG 15 in fragile countries and risks of unintended side effects are much more significant. For instance, deforestation and forest degrada-

## **SUSTAINABLE LAND AND FOREST MANAGEMENT...**

**...NEEDS TO BE AN ESSENTIAL PART OF SDG16 ACTIVITIES ON PEACE, JUSTICE AND GOOD INSTITUTIONS, ESPECIALLY IN FRAGILE STATES.**

<sup>30</sup> UN Environment 2018

<sup>31</sup> FAO 2016

<sup>32</sup> Nett and Rüttinger 2017

tion can increase in post-war situations, if forest territory earlier in control of armed rebels becomes accessible. Sustainable forest and land management in fragile and conflict contexts thus require a different, specifically conflict-sensitive approach.

Foreign policy can play a critical role in supporting sustainable management of land and forest resources by facilitating data exchange across borders, supporting the implementation of key international agreements in international fora, investing in and co-designing local restoration programmes and support community-based environmental stewardship. By promoting and supporting development plans that integrate conservation efforts and by investing in modern land management technologies, structural drivers of human insecurity can be eliminated, while at the same time creating resilience against slow and sudden onset disasters such as droughts and floods, which again can contribute to forced displacement<sup>33</sup>.

The UN Security Council has called for risk assessment and management strategies that include coordinating policies, strategies, and programs addressing humanitarian needs, livelihood insecurity, climate change adaptation, and peace building. However, these considerations have not been adequately integrated into foreign/humanitarian policy processes yet.

Forests deliver a range of services to humans. They support the freshwater cycle (SDG6), infiltrate soils, and increase the overall resilience of landscapes and communities. They also offer habitat to biodiversity, which in turn provides essential services for human well-being and influences societies' ability to alleviate poverty (SDG1), ensure food security (SDG2) and more generally, withstand shocks and respond to various disturbances. Conserving, managing and restoring forests and their services (addressed under target 15.2) are not only necessary to reduce CO2 emissions (SDG13), but will maintain and in some cases reinstate livelihoods and biodiversity, and help in preventing and strengthening the foundation of a socially and economically stable society (SDG16). The same holds true for combatting desertification and land restoration (addressed under target 15.3).

Biological diversity, which is addressed under target 15.5, provides essential services for human well-being and influences societies' ability to alleviate poverty, ensure food security and more generally, withstand shocks and respond to various disturbances. Combatting the alarming trend of biodiversity loss and broadening the participation in decision-making processes for biodiversity conservation can, therefore, be a means to build peaceful and resilient societies. Besides, illegally sourced and traded wildlife products are often used by radical organizations as a source of income<sup>34</sup> and indirectly endanger security<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> IDMC 2018

<sup>34</sup> UNODC 2016

<sup>35</sup> e.g. the so-called "Sutherland Report", submitted to the UN General Assembly (UN General Assembly 2017)

## FORESTS...

**... MAINTAIN LIVELIHOODS AND BIODIVERSITY. THEY OFTEN BUILD THE FOUNDATION OF A SOCIALLY AND ECONOMICALLY STABLE SOCIETY**

## BIODIVERSITY...

**...PROVIDES ESSENTIAL SERVICES FOR HUMAN WELL-BEING AND INFLUENCES SOCIETIES' ABILITY TO WITHSTAND SHOCKS**

### **Illustration: poor forest governance fuels conflict in Myanmar**

Forced migration of more than hundreds of thousands of people is a result of more than six decades of armed conflict and recurring outbursts of violence. Although Myanmar is in the process of negotiating peace, the southeast of the country is still facing acute humanitarian vulnerability with little prospects for stable livelihoods<sup>36</sup>. How is this linked to SDG15? Myanmar has the third highest deforestation rate in the world, losing about 2% of its forests per year<sup>37</sup> due to unsustainable logging and extensive agricultural development. Land property rights in forested regions are poorly developed, and undemocratic governance and mismanagement of forest resources have fuelled political grievances and non-state actors taking control of territories using violence. The perception of unequal distribution of timber revenues sustains the tensions<sup>38</sup>. For a democratic transition and successful peace negotiations, the fair management of Myanmar's natural resources is vital. Progress towards sustainable forest management (SDG target 15.2) and ensuring the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity, to enhance their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for sustainable development (SDG target 15.5) would yield high peace dividends.

### **Conclusion**

Protecting life on land is essential to securing livelihoods of many populations around the world. Deforestation, desertification and biodiversity loss increase the grievances, exacerbate conflict and can be a driver of migration. Protection and fair distribution of natural resources provided by functioning terrestrial ecosystems is thus an important part of reducing conflict, especially in fragile societies, while conservation activities themselves can be a vehicle for building peace. Foreign policy can benefit from analysing the complex interaction of life on land and conflict and use its unique tools to set off positive dynamics of better resource management and socio-political gains, with a view to building resilience.

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<sup>36</sup> Norwegian Institute of International Affairs 2018

<sup>37</sup> EEAS 2018

<sup>38</sup> Finaz and Wah 2016

# SDG 17 GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS



## *Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development*

The SDG 17 calls for getting the foundations right for substantial progress on the 2030 Agenda. It includes key conditions for successful sustainability action that are relevant across all actor groups, and most of them depend on international cooperation. However, from a foreign policy perspective that focuses on (global) geopolitical and (local) conflict cycle implications, some targets stand out. Finance and trade flows that secure an economic and environmental basis for resilience need to inform promotion of foreign trade and investment (targets 17.1-17.5, 17.10-17.12). Policy and institutional coherence (targets 17.13-17.15) and multi-stakeholder partnerships (targets 17.16-17.17) are essential for making a foreign policy contribution to the 2030 Agenda, particularly, to prevent conflict and cope with geopolitical shifts.

### **Finance & Trade**

The extent to which international finance and trade affect both sustainable development opportunities of states and global commons must not be underestimated<sup>39</sup>. These complex dynamics transcend national boundaries and governance levels, challenging a state-centred world order. Besides, sustainable trade and investment are essential for global peace and stability. Promotion of foreign trade and investment (and economic diplomacy in general) has been gaining importance during the last decades<sup>40</sup>, has been facilitating economic relations, e.g., through conferences and support of delegation trips, and has become an essential part of diplomacy. Many interest groups are involved with forming trade and investment policies, which can be highly sensitive and include points on balancing strong domestic interests. However, economic foreign policy needs to be guided to a greater extent by resilience and stability priorities as opposed to the mere facilitation of international economic relations between different actors. This also means actively promoting sustainable development.

Currently, trade and investment flows often get locked in unsustainable dynamics, making it more difficult for poorer and fragile countries to develop sustainable, productive economies while fuelling environmental degradation<sup>41</sup>. This can exacerbate and prolong conflict, undermining progress on SDG 16. Thus, to achieve SDGs, we need to

### **ECONOMIC FOREIGN POLICY ...**

**...NEEDS TO BE GUIDED BY PRIORITIES OF RESILIENCE AND STABILITY TO A GREATER EXTENT.**

<sup>39</sup> Chakraborty and Sacchidananda 2013

<sup>40</sup> Woolcock and Bayne 2013

<sup>41</sup> Chakraborty and Sacchidananda 2013, UNEP 2017

transform global trade and investment. International trade regulations (e.g. WTO regime), regional (e.g. EU trade agreements with other regions) and bilateral trade relations need to promote a sustainable use of developing countries' natural assets and provide them with a sound economic basis for sustainable development<sup>42</sup>, fostering local development and opportunities for stability and peace. The coherence of investment and sustainability policies needs to be strengthened in export promotion, investment protection, development and humanitarian finance.

This requires a transformation at an enormous scale that will impact geopolitics. Making international investment flows compatible with planetary boundaries will likely bring about devaluation of many national assets as well as a major shift in economic structures in developing and fragile countries, for example, certain forms of agricultural production or extractive activities will change drastically or stop<sup>43</sup>. Without proactive multilateral and multilevel transition governance, this can threaten geopolitical stability<sup>44</sup>. To minimise stability risks and to be able to steer these highly complex internationalised processes, there is a pronounced need for international solutions. At the same time, if guided accordingly, such transformation can provide significant peace dividends, giving fragile societies the means to satisfy the needs of their populations in the long term and improving institutions as mandated by SGD 16.

### ***Policy and institutional coherence***

Foreign policy must work to improve coherence in external action to promote sustainability as well as contribute to resilience and geopolitical perspectives to sustainable development activities. Policy and institutional coherence is a central requirement for implementing the 2030 Agenda. Firstly, all political actors need to prioritise the 2030 Agenda and seek for effective instruments to implement it. Secondly, sustainability in general and implementing the 2030 Agenda, in particular, is per se a balancing act: the overall purpose is only served by achieving all of the different goals together. Inevitable trade-offs thus need to be resolved. For instance, one cannot combat poverty by endangering life on land or promote education that hampers gender equality. Simultaneously achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda requires understanding how negative and positive co-impacts emerge in specific contexts, as the interpretation of goal achievement, concrete measures, and possible feedback loops will differ significantly between countries, sectors, etc. Without increasing policy and institutional coherence, there is little prospect of societies accomplishing this complex exercise. Coherence is also closely linked to the institution-related targets of SDG 16.

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT NEEDS TO BECOME A COMPASS OF ALL FOREIGN POLICY...**

**...RATHER THAN AN 'ADD-ON' TOPIC, AS IT IS NEEDED TO SUSTAIN PEACE.**

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<sup>42</sup> OECD 2015, GCEC 2016

<sup>43</sup> Ivleva et al. 2017, Rautner et al. 2016

<sup>44</sup> de Jong 2017

From a foreign policy perspective, we can infer the following points: 1) sustainable development needs to become a compass of all foreign policy rather than an 'add-on' topic, as it is needed to sustain peace; 2) it is important to increase the understanding of how priorities of peace and stability interact with the implementation on the 2030 Agenda; 3) it is crucial to identify the actions that can make the implementation of the 2030 Agenda compatible with these priorities and 4) these actions need to be coherently implemented across the actors' spectrum.

While many actors are involved in the external action, foreign policy has the task to lead the way, shape strategies and bring together national priorities and international challenges at hand. Inherently political interaction and professional diplomatic networks cannot be replaced, making foreign policy a suitable driver of policy integration needed to enhance sustainable development in the international realm. Diplomats can help mainstream conflict-sensitive sustainability action into peacebuilding, humanitarian aid and if the respective responsibility lies with them, development cooperation. They also need to integrate sustainable development throughout the strands and forums of foreign policy.

For this, different instruments are available. A portfolio screening, specific to the responsibilities of a given country's foreign affairs ministry, can be an appropriate starting point. Overarching planning divisions or working groups of ministries of foreign affairs can be tasked with portfolio integration – provided they receive sufficient backing from the leadership. Aligning foreign policy spending with sustainable development goals is a powerful integration instrument. Training activities, tailored to the different target groups, present another major opportunity to mainstream sustainable development into foreign policy.

### ***Multi-stakeholder partnerships***

Strong cross-sectoral partnerships and strong multilateral governance are necessary for implementing the SDGs. Both aspects are crucial from a foreign policy perspective. Making the full use of the diplomatic toolbox is essential to create a broad backing and enable effective, innovative partnerships for sustainable development. But a global sustainable transition is likely to bring about power shifts, with new governance challenges, risk complexes, and other unintended consequences. Strengthening multilateral interaction is essential to being able to cope with this, making sure the international community comes together in the process instead of drifting apart.

Implementing the 2030 Agenda is a whole-of-society effort rather than a top-down task exclusively for national governments. Fully recognising this cross-sectoral dimension can also allow for maximising the peace dividend of sustainable development, promoting SDG 16. Foreign policy can play an important facilitating role for partnerships with investment institutions, the private sector, and the civil society. Balancing of interests is central to a sustainable transformation, as it has distributional implications, that is, creates winners and losers or faces opposition by vested interests. Where these impli-

## **IMPLEMENTING THE 2030 AGENDA IS A WHOLE-OF- SOCIETY TASK**

cations are international, diplomacy has a pivotal role to play and is called upon to tap into its capabilities to seek a balance of interests for ambitious action. One of the specific modes is brokering or mediation: here, foreign policy can help achieve an agreement on contested and conflict issues, for instance, in the case of transboundary water agreements.

Moreover, foreign policy needs to come to terms with broader trends of change in international relations. The framework of international engagement includes multiple levels of forums and arenas. The boundaries between actors that we see as 'domestic' and 'foreign' are permeable. Managing heterogeneous, fluid and often complex networks is indispensable<sup>45</sup>. In regards to this, foreign policy's role in securing effective multilateral arrangements to promote SDG implementation, cushioning risks, is also vital.

Joint action and pooling capacities are an essential part of accelerating a transition. These can include:

- Alliances of front-runner states that seek to accelerate specific technologies and alliances between front-runners and laggards to help the latter to advance;
- Regional alliances for cooperation on transboundary issues or topics of joint concern (e.g., regional water and energy cooperation, insurance initiatives);
- Capacity-building partnerships (e.g., NDC Partnership, research collaboration).

#### **Illustration: entry points for sustainable finance and trade**

Trade affects ecosystem services and economic complexity of states including factors such as natural resource dependence or technological capacities, showing its potential to influence resilience. Trade arrangements could support or disrupt local food production in developing and fragile countries. In 2015, WTO members agreed to eliminate agricultural export subsidies, which is considered the most significant reform of agriculture trade rules in the history of WTO<sup>46</sup>. A regional example is the EU's association agreement with Central America with provisions to foster sustainable development through trade<sup>47</sup>. The volatility of commodity prices is another major risk for fragile societies. To secure food supply, there is an interim agreement at the WTO not to challenge public stockholding programmes as trade distortion<sup>48</sup>.

Export promotion efforts can concentrate on sustainable technologies. Trade regimes and agreements can promote trade in environmental goods and services, e.g., by tackling tariff and non-tariff barriers. These negotiations are a complex diplomatic task: the lists of products that are considered sustainable and receive preferential tariff treat-

## **TRADE AND FINANCE POLICIES NEED TO SUPPORT RESILIENCE...**

**...ON GLOBAL, REGIONAL AND BILATERAL LEVELS.**

<sup>45</sup> Cooper et al. 2013, Heine 2013, Hocking et al. 2012

<sup>46</sup> WTO, no date

<sup>47</sup> CIFCA 2016

<sup>48</sup> WTO, no date

ment are contested, as this benefits or harms trade balances of specific countries<sup>49</sup>.

The criteria applied by finance institutions should ensure investment patterns consistent with SDGs. For example, the OECD restricted export credit finance that is directed to coal power plants. International investment agreements (IIAs) should not undermine national environmental regulations or sustainable taxation as private enterprises often receive broad rights to go to court with national governments over their regulation<sup>50</sup>. International investments should not incentivise resource use against resilience principles, e.g., land or water grabs. Sustainability criteria need to play a much stronger role in commodity investment, while investors should closely monitor climate and environmental risks and make them transparent<sup>51</sup>.

#### **Illustration: EU Global Strategy for a more coherent external action**

The EU Global Strategy seeks a consistent security agenda based on resilience and sustainability. The strategy highlights the “notion of a joined-up Union” working across policy sectors, an integrated approach to conflicts and the importance of internal-external nexus. The strategy states: “A prosperous Union also hinges on an open and fair international economic system and sustainable access to the global commons. The EU will foster the resilience of its democracies. Consistently living up to our values will determine our external credibility and influence<sup>52</sup>.” Already in the drafting phase, the EEAS gathered input from several Directorates-General (as well as from the civil society and the private sector)<sup>53</sup>.

#### **Illustration: harnessing innovative partnerships and approaches to diplomacy**

*Ad-hoc coalitions:* Often, policies such as renewable energy deployment are promoted by groups of states based on a joint understanding of a specific issue, but not supported by a binding agreement or a clear institutional structure (e.g., Mission Innovation). Ad-hoc coalitions offer excellent opportunities to tackle specific barriers to sustainable action as they are flexible in structure, based on a voluntary commitment of like-minded actors and concentrate on particular areas of work. They can kick-start action through several front-runners and decrease the barriers for others.

*The “ecosystem approach”* of the EU Climate Diplomacy is based on the assumption that climate action and its ambition level are formed by an ecosystem of domestic and external actors from politics, business, administration, civil society, academia and the media. To promote climate action, diplomacy should harness the potential of the whole ecosystem rather than focussing on policymakers. For instance, during

**FOREIGN POLICY  
CAN HARNESS  
THE POTENTIAL  
OF INNOVATIVE  
PARTNERSHIPS...**

**...SUCH AS AD-HOC  
COALITIONS AND EU'S  
“ECOSYSTEM DIPLO-  
MACY”.**

<sup>49</sup> Bacchus 2016, Droege et al. 2016

<sup>50</sup> SRU 2016

<sup>51</sup> HLEG 2018, WWF 2012

<sup>52</sup> EU 2016

<sup>53</sup> Tocci 2016

the EU Week of Climate Diplomacy, the EU Delegation to Australia organised a broad variety of events on climate security with over 1,000 participants to bring different parts of the “climate-ecosystem” together<sup>54</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

Foreign policy has a substantial role to play in leveraging broad partnerships for sustainable development, providing coherent strategies for states’ external action and making international finance and trade more compatible with sustainability and resilience. Implementing SDG 17 also offers opportunities to strengthen multilateralism and improve international policy effectiveness. In the end, SDG 17 embodies what foreign policy is about – building and strengthening partnerships for mutual benefit and understanding.

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<sup>54</sup> Wolters and Schaller 2018

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## Download the Paper

In this annex, we provide a more detailed analysis of the SDGs under review to complement the paper: A foreign policy perspective on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Please download the main paper from [www.climate-diplomacy.org/publications](http://www.climate-diplomacy.org/publications).

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